Mas'alah fī al-Irādah

Issue on irādah of Allah, the Exalted

Authored by

Shaykh al-Mufīd, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Niʿmān ibn al-Muʿallim Abī ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿAkkabrī, al-Baghdādī

(336 - 413 AH)

[Translator's Note]

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

All praise is for Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And praise be to Him in the Hereafter. He is the All-Wise, All-Aware.

I found this profound treatise written by the esteemed scholar, Sheikh al-Mufīd (may Allah be pleased with him), on the Irādah (Will) of Allah—a work that unveils new dimensions of wisdom, contemplation, and theological perspectives. It is a discourse that challenges the intellect and deepens one's understanding of divine attributes.

As this treatise was not readily available in the English language, I took the initiative to translate it, hoping to make its invaluable insights accessible to a wider audience. The translation was carried out with a basic understanding of Arabic and with the assistance of AI tools, striving to maintain accuracy while preserving the depth of the original text. Despite my utmost efforts to avoid errors, I acknowledge that imperfections may remain. Therefore, I humbly request forgiveness for any mistakes and ask you to pray for me, my family, and all seekers of knowledge.

May Allah illuminate the path of those who seek wisdom and grant them steadfastness in their pursuit. May He make the journey of knowledge an enlightening and rewarding endeavor for all who walk upon it.

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَن يُؤْتَ الحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُوْلُواْ الْأَلْبَابِ

He grants wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been granted wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will be reminded except those of understanding.

~ Surah Al-Baqarah (2:269)

-Sarim Jafri

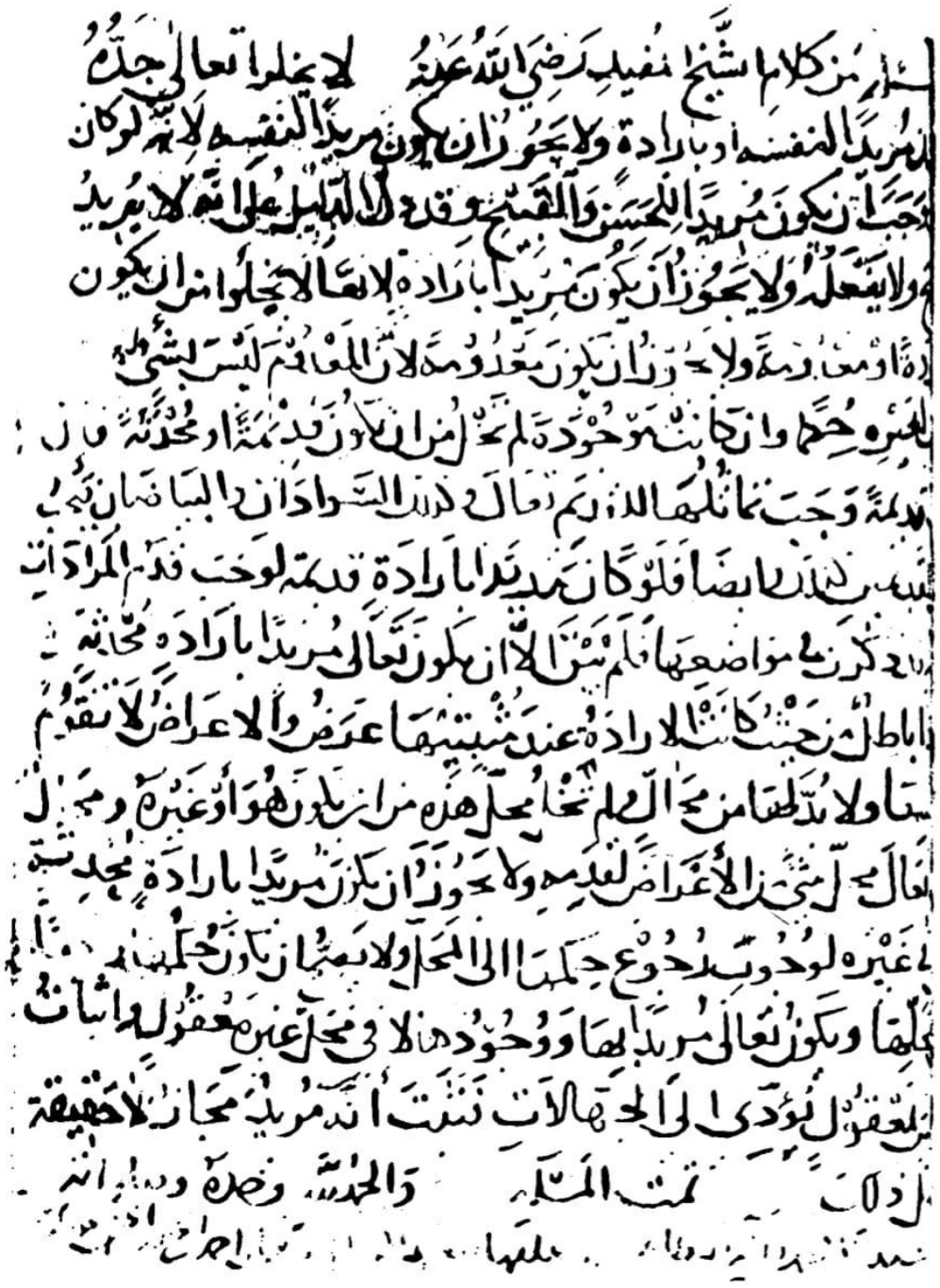

Image of Manuscript

Issue on the Will (Irādah) of Allah, the Exalted

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Exalted, whose majesty is supreme, is not devoid of either willing by Himself or by means of a will (irādah). It is not possible for Him to be a willer (murīd) by Himself, for if that were the case, He would necessarily will both what is good (ḥasan) and what is evil (qabīḥ), whereas the rational proof has established that He does not will evil, nor does He bring it into existence.

Likewise, it is not possible for Him to be a willer by means of a will (irādah), since this will is either existent or non-existent. It cannot be non-existent, for a non-existent entity is nothing and cannot confer any ruling upon another.

If this will is existent, then it is either eternal (qadīm) or originated (muḥdath). If it were eternal, it would necessarily be equivalent to the Eternal (i.e., Allah, the Exalted), just as two instances of blackness or whiteness are equivalent to each other. Consequently, it would necessitate the equivalence of two eternal beings, which is impossible.

Furthermore, if He were a willer by means of an eternal will, then the objects of His will (murādāt) would also have to be eternal—based on arguments established in their respective places.

The only remaining possibility, then, is that He is a willer by means of an originated will. However, this is false, because according to those who affirm it, the will is an accident (ʿaraḍ), and accidents do not subsist by themselves—they require a substrate (maḥall) to exist in. The substrate of this will must either be Allah Himself or something else. It is impossible for the Eternal (Allah) to be the substrate of any accidents.

Moreover, it is not possible for Him to be a willer by means of an originated will that inheres in something else, because its ruling would necessarily return to that substrate. If the ruling of this will returns to its substrate, then it is that substrate which is the willer (murīd)—not Allah. The existence of this will without a substrate is inconceivable. Affirming something that is inconceivable leads to ignorance and falsehood.

Thus, it is established that His being a willer is figurative (majāz), not real (ḥaqīqah). So reflect upon this.

The issue is concluded, and all praise belongs to Allah alone. May His blessings be upon our Master, Muḥammad, and his pure progeny.

This was transcribed by the servant in need of Allah, Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-ʿŪdī [al-Asadī al-Ḥillī].

Continuation:

Al-Karājikī (may Allah's mercy be upon him) said in *Kanz al-Fawāʾid*:

Clarification on Figurative Attributes

As for those attributes that are ascribed to Allah, the Exalted, while their literal meaning is not intended in themselves, they are many. Among them are: willer (murīd), detester (kārih), angry (ghaḍbān), pleased (rāḍ), loving (muḥibb), hating (mubghiḍ), hearing (samīʿ), seeing (baṣīr), perceiving (rāʾī), and apprehending (mudrik). These are attributes for which intellect does not necessitate their ascription to Him. Rather, we follow the transmitted texts (*samʿ*) that have reported them. However, these texts have only been conveyed in accordance with linguistic conventions and their broad usages, and the intended meaning of each of these attributes is different from its literal sense.

Discussion on the Attribute of "Willer" (Murīd)

Know that a willer (murīd) in its true and rational sense is one who inclines toward one of two opposing possibilities that occur to his mind, and this

inclination arises from his deliberate intention and preference of one over the other.

This, however, is among the attributes of created beings, and it is impossible to ascribe it in its true sense to the Lord of the Worlds. For He, glorified is He, is not subject to passing thoughts, nor does He require the slightest reflection or contemplation.

Since this is as we have explained, then when we say that Allah, the Exalted, is a "willer" of His actions, what is meant is that His actions occur while He is aware of them and not heedless of them. Moreover, they do not come into existence due to an external cause necessitating them.

For we observe that when one of us intends an action while being aware of it and not heedless of it—and it is not brought into existence by an external cause—such a person is deemed a willer (murīd) of that action.

Thus, if we wish to express that Allah, the Exalted, acts without heedlessness, without forgetfulness, and without being necessitated by an external cause, we say that He is a willer (murīd) of His action.

However, this description is metaphorical (majāz), for its true essence, as we have explained, can only belong to that which is originated (muḥdath).

Proof (Dalīl) on the Ascription of Will (Irādah) to Allah

That which establishes the correctness of our stance regarding the ascription of will (irādah) to Allah, the Exalted, is the fact that if He were a willer (murīd) in the true sense, then the matter would not be devoid of two possibilities:

1. Either He is a willer by Himself (*murīd li-nafsihi*).
2. Or He is a willer by means of a will (irādah).

If He were a willer by Himself, then it would necessarily follow that He wills both good (ḥasan) and evil (qabīḥ)—just as if He were knowing by Himself, He would necessarily know both good and evil. However, it is

impossible for Allah, the Exalted, to will evil, as rational proof has established.

This discussion also applies to the Jabrites (al-Mujabbirah) who assert that Allah creates all actions, whether good or evil.

Thus, since it is established that Allah, the Almighty, cannot will reprehensible (qabīḥ) things, it is known that He is not a willer by Himself.

If, on the other hand, He were a willer by means of a will (irādah), then this will must either be:

1. Eternal (qadīmah)
2. Originated (muḥdathah)

It is impossible for it to be eternal, as we have already demonstrated that nothing is eternal except Allah, the Exalted.

This discussion also refutes the Jabrites, who claim that there exists an eternal will alongside Allah.

Furthermore, if Allah were always a willer (murīd) from eternity, whether by Himself or by means of an eternal will, then His objects of will (murādāt) would also have to exist eternally alongside Him—because nothing prevents Him from fulfilling His will, nor is there any barrier between Him and that which He wills.

Thus, the actions He brings into existence would not vary in their times, nor would some of them be delayed while others are advanced, since the will would always be present and productive (*ḥāṣilah mujida*) at every moment.

All of this demonstrates that Allah, the Exalted, has not been a willer from eternity, neither by Himself nor by means of an eternal will.

Refutation of an Originated (Muḥdath) Will

Since this has been invalidated, the only remaining possibility is that He became a willer (murīd) after previously not being a willer, by means of an originated will (irādah muḥdathah).

However, this is also impossible, because will (irādah) is an accident (ʿaraḍ), and every accident requires a substrate (maḥall) in which to exist.

> Allah, the Exalted, is not a substrate for accidents.
>
> Nor is it possible for His will to inhere in something else—just as it is not possible for Him to be knowing by means of knowledge (ʿilm) that inheres in another entity, or powerful by means of power (qudrah) that inheres in another entity.

Nor is it possible for His will to exist neither in Him nor in anything else, because will is an accident, and every accident requires a substrate in which it exists and by which it is sustained.

If it were permissible for a will to exist without inhering in a willer (murīd) or anything else, then it would likewise be permissible for a movement (ḥarakah) to exist without inhering in a mover (muḥarrik) or anything else.

Countering an Objection

If it is said:
"Movement is a property (hayʾah) of a body (jism), and it is not possible for a property to exist without inhering in something."

We respond:
"Why should this be impossible?"

If it is then said:
"Because the change in the state of a body is perceptible by the senses, and therefore the quality that causes this change must necessarily inhere in it."

We reply:
"Likewise, when a willer (murīd) begins to will something after not having willed it previously, he perceives a change within himself. Thus, it is necessary that his will (irādah) inheres within him."

If it is then asked:
"By which of the senses is will (irādah) perceived?"

We respond:
"By the same sense by which headache (ṣudāʿ) is perceived."

If it is asked:

"A human being perceives the pain of a headache necessarily and in a specific location."

We respond:

"Why then do you not specify a particular sense through which it is perceived?"

Thus, we have the right to say: "Similarly, a true willer (murīd) perceives a change in his sensation and recognizes it within himself necessarily."

A Passage from Our Shaykh al-Mufīd (may Allah be pleased with him) on Irādah

Shaykh al-Mufīd (May Allah be pleased with him) said:

"The will (irādah) of Allah, the Exalted, is the very act (fiʿl) itself, whereas for created beings, it is an internal state (ḍamīr) and similar aspects that are only applicable to those with needs and deficiencies."

The rational intellects testify that intent (qaṣd) can only exist in a heart (qalb), just as desire (shahwah) and love (maḥabbah) can only be found in one who possesses a heart. Similarly, intention (niyyah), thought (ḍamīr), and resolve (ʿazm) are only applicable to those who experience mental occurrences (khawāṭir) that compel them toward an action, leading them to will (irādah), intend (niyyah), and resolve (ʿazm) upon it.

Since Allah, the Exalted, is far above needing anything, and it is impossible for Him to be described with bodily limbs and instruments, nor can He be subject to inclinations (dawāʿī) and fleeting thoughts (khaṭarāt), it follows that He does not require intent (qaṣd) and resolve (ʿazm) in order to perform actions.

Thus, it is established that His attribution of "will" (irādah) differs in meaning from its attribution to creation. For Him, will is nothing but the very act itself (nafs fiʿlih), and its ascription to Him is based on linguistic convention (ittibāʿ) rather than rational analogy (qiyās).

This is exactly what has been transmitted from the Imāms of guidance (ʿalayhim as-salām).

The Hadith of Imām al-Riḍā (peace be upon him)) on Irādah

Shaykh al-Mufīd (May Allah be pleased with him) said:

Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn Qūlawayh narrated from Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, from Aḥmad ibn Idrīs, from Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabbār, from Ṣafwān ibn Yaḥyā, who said:

I said to Abū al-Ḥasan (Imām al-Riḍā, peace be upon him)):

“Tell me about the will (irādah) of Allah and the will of creation?”

He (peace be upon him)) replied:

“The will (irādah) of creation is an internal state (ḍamīr) that manifests after consideration, whereas the will (irādah) of Allah, the Exalted, is simply the occurrence of the act itself and nothing beyond that. For He, the Exalted, does not entertain thoughts (yahumm), nor does He deliberate (yatafakkar).”

Shaykh al-Mufīd's Commentary on the Hadith

Shaykh al-Mufīd (May Allah be pleased with him) commented:

"This statement of our Master (peace be upon him)) is a clear text in favor of my position regarding Allah’s will (irādah)."

It also serves as clear evidence for another position of mine, which is that the will (irādah) of a servant precedes his action (fiʿl).

This was also the view of al-Balkhī, as he held that the will of an individual must precede the act they intend to perform.

The discussion on whether will (irādah) precedes the willed act (murād) is akin to the discussion on whether power (qudrah) precedes the action (fiʿl).

The statement of the Imām (peace be upon him)) in the aforementioned hadith—"The will (irādah) of creation is an internal state (ḍamīr) that manifests after consideration"—is explicit in affirming that will precedes the act, since the act emerges after the will.

If the matter were as al-Jubbāʾī claimed, then the act would appear simultaneously with the will, and it would not be delayed until after the will occurs.

The Precedence of Will Over the Willed Act

Know that we hold the view that will (irādah) precedes the willed act (murād) just as power (qudrah) precedes the thing it enables (maqdūr).

However, there is a fundamental distinction:

1. Will (irādah) necessarily leads to the willed act (murād).
2. Power (qudrah), on the other hand, does not necessarily lead to the act (maqdūr).

Furthermore, will (irādah) can only be directed toward the willed act (murād) itself and not toward its opposite.

This is unlike power (qudrah), which can either be applied to bring an act into existence or to abstain from it, as it allows for both possibilities.

Lastly, both will (irādah) and power (qudrah) are accidents (aʿrāḍ) that cannot persist (lā yaṣiḥ buqāʾuhā).

Chapter: The Meaning of Saying That Will (Irādah) is Necessary (Mūjibah)

When we say that will (irādah) is necessary (mūjibah), we mean that when a living being wills something, the existence of that thing becomes necessary, unless something external prevents it. However, it is not possible for the willer to abstain from what he has willed by his own choice.

One of the proofs for this is that it has already been established that will (irādah) precedes the willed act (murād), since it is impossible for a person to will something at the exact moment he is performing it—otherwise, he would be willing something already in existence, which is just as impossible as having power (qudrah) over something that already exists.

If it is established that will precedes the willed act, then the movement of a person's hand must either:

1. Necessarily follow the will (irādah) immediately without any gap, or
2. It is possible for the movement not to occur, in which case it would only be absent due to the presence of stillness (sukūn) in its place.

If stillness were to occur right after the person willed movement, then it must be either:

1. Done with will (irādah), which is impossible because that would mean he simultaneously willed both movement and stillness for the same thing, or
2. Done out of forgetfulness (sahw), which is also impossible while he is actively willing movement.

Thus, it is impossible for a person to abstain from what he has already willed, as we have explained.

Issue: The Meaning of "Allah Willed This but Not That"

If someone asks:

"If you claim that Allah's will (irādah) for His actions is identical to the actions themselves, and that He has no will apart from the willed act, then what does it mean when you say: 'Allah willed this meaning in the verse but not that meaning,' or 'Allah willed generality (ʿumūm) and not specificity (khuṣūṣ),' or vice versa?"

We reply:

"The decree (maqdūr) includes multiple statements (akhbār) about different things."

Thus, when we say: *"Allah willed this but not that,"* we mean:

1. He brought into existence (faʿala) the statement that conveys this meaning, and
2. He did not bring into existence the statement that conveys that meaning.
3. He created speech that conveys generality and did not create speech that conveys specificity, or vice versa.

This is similar to how we say:

> "When we recite 'Al-Ḥamdu lillāhi Rabb al-ʿĀlamīn' intending it as Qurʾān, then it is Qurʾān."
>
> "If we intend it as a form of thanking Allah (shukr), then it is an expression of gratitude."

We do not mean that a single statement changes its nature based on our intention—that it becomes Qurʾān when we intend it as such and merely our own words when we intend it otherwise.

Rather, we mean that it is within our ability to utter two separate statements—one as Qurʾān and another as an expression of gratitude—and we choose between them accordingly.

If someone asks:

"Does this mean that 'Al-Ḥamdu lillāhi Rabb al-ʿĀlamīn' becomes something that you can create?"

We answer:

"This pertains to the distinction between 'reporting (ḥikāyah)' and 'that which is being reported (al-maḥkī)', which is a separate topic that we will address, if Allah wills."

Issue: The Meaning of Allah's Will (Irādah) Regarding Human Actions

As for Allah's will concerning the actions of His creation, it refers to His command (amr) for them to perform those actions.

Thus, when we say:

"Allah wills (yurīd) such-and-such from His servants,"

we mean this figuratively (majāzan) and metaphorically (istiʿāran), just as we do whenever we attribute will (irādah) to anyone regarding something that is not his own act.

For example:

> "So-and-so wants (yurīdu minnī) me to go to him" This means "he commands (yaʾmuru) me to do so and obligates me."
>
> "So-and-so wanted me (arādanī) to do such-and-such" This means "he ordered me to do it."

Thus, when we say:

"Allah wants (yurīdu) obedience from His servants,"

we mean:

"He commands them to obey Him."

Figurative (Majāzī) Uses of Will (Irādah) in Speech

Sometimes, will (irādah) is used figuratively to mean desire (tamannī) or longing (shahwah).

For example, one might say:

1. "I want (urīdu) such-and-such to happen,"
   meaning "I desire it" (tamannaytuhu).
2. "This is what I wanted (urīdu),"
   meaning "this is what I longed for and was inclined toward (ishtahaytuhu wa mālat nafsī ilayhi)."

There are many such metaphorical usages of will (irādah) in language.

Issue: The Meaning of Allah's Dislike (Karahiyyah) of Something

As for Allah's dislike (karāhah) of something, it refers to His prohibition (nahy) of it, and this too is a figurative (majāzī) expression, just like will (irādah).

So understand this well.

The Meaning of Anger and Pleasure

Anger (ghadab) and pleasure (riḍā) are qualities that can only be properly understood in creatures, because anger represents a distaste or aversion of the nature, and pleasure represents a inclination or calmness of the soul. When Allah is described with anger and pleasure, this is understood metaphorically (majāz), meaning it refers to His reward (thawāb) and punishment (ʿiqāb).

Allah's pleasure means the existence of His reward.

Allah's anger means the existence of His punishment.

Thus, when we say "Allah is pleased with him", we mean Allah rewarded him. When we say "Allah is angry with him", we mean Allah punished him.

When anger and pleasure are attributed to human actions, they refer to commands and prohibitions. We say that Allah is pleased with obedience, meaning He commands it, and that Allah is angry with disobedience, meaning He forbids it.

The Meaning of Love and Hate

Love (ḥubb) and hate (bughḍ) are also qualities attributed to Allah metaphorically. True love is the affection or attachment of the soul to the beloved, while hate is the opposite—displeasure or repulsion. These cannot be applied literally to Allah, as such feelings imply deficiency or change, which are not applicable to Him.

When we say "Allah loves the believer" and "Allah hates the disbeliever", we mean that Allah grants favors to the believer and punishes the disbeliever. Similarly, when we say "Allah loves obedience from His servants" and "Allah hates disobedience from His servants", it means that Allah commands obedience and prohibits disobedience, following the same metaphorical sense as in anger and pleasure.

The Meaning of Hearing (Samīʿ) and Sight (Baṣīr)

In truth, hearing (samʿ) is the ability to perceive sounds through the sense of hearing, and sight (baṣar) is the ability to perceive visual objects through the sense of sight. These are attributes that cannot be applied literally to Allah because He perceives all things without the use of senses or instruments.

When we say Allah is Samīʿ (All-Hearing), it means nothing is hidden from Him of the sounds, and when we say Allah is Baṣīr (All-Seeing), it means nothing is hidden from Him of the visible objects. He knows these things in their true nature, not through hearing or sight, and not by any means beyond His inherent knowledge (ʿilm).

The narrations from the Imāms (peace be upon them) confirm this understanding.

Shaykh al-Mufīd (may Allah have mercy on him) reported:

Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn Qulūyah narrated from Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī from ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Hāshim from Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā from Ḥammād from Ḥarīz from Muḥammad ibn Sālim al-Ṭufī, who said:

"I asked Abū Jaʿfar al-Bāqir (peace be upon him): 'Some people from Iraq claim that Allah is Samīʿ and Baṣīr as we understand it.'"

He replied: "Glory be to Allah! This is understood in relation to the created beings. Allah is not like that."

Similarly, in a narration from Imām al-Riḍā (peace be upon him), he clarified the matter, stating that when we say Allah is Samīʿ, it means that nothing of the sounds is hidden from Him, and when we say Allah is Baṣīr, it means that nothing of the visible objects is hidden from Him, but this does not mean the literal sense of hearing or sight. The term "seeing" in this context is another expression of knowing all things in their entirety, and the term "hearing" is an expression of knowing all sounds.

Thus, these are metaphorical attributes, and all praise is due to Allah.

End of the Treatise